

Zero Retries issue 0015 2021-10-22

Advanced Amateur Radio - Data Communications; Space; Microwave... the fun stuff! Nothing great has ever been accomplished without irrational exuberance - Tom Evslin. Irrational exuberance is pretty much the business model of Zero Retries - Steve Stroh N8GNJ The Universal Purpose of Ham Radio is to have fun messing around with radios - Bob Witte K0NR

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In this issue:

- **Thoughts On Community**
 - **HamWAN Puget Sound Data Ring Loses Several Sites**
 - **Request to Send**
 - **ZR > BEACON**
 - **Closing The Channel**
-

Thoughts on Community

In discussing community, I'm referring to a group of people with a shared interest, not as a synonym for city, town, etc.

I made a minor point in Zero Retries 0014 about the community aspect of makerspaces:

But mostly... makerspaces are about community. Makerspaces don't emphasize that aspect nearly enough, to their detriment. They talk about the tools, but they don't talk enough about the people. Techies (like me) tend towards introversion, and a makerspace is a great place for techie introverts to feel part of a community because you're working in a shared space, and often working on shared projects. What really makes a makerspace [function] is for curious people to find them and every hour spent in a makerspace is a learning experience because you're surrounded by other people with interesting skills.

In Zero Retries, I promote individual experimentation and self-education on "advanced" modes, much of which can be done "solo". But the truth is that we (Amateur Radio experimenters and techies) don't exist in a vacuum, and we ignore "community" and "the world at large" at our peril. Yes, we feel like we can do that - we can work on things solo... but really, we can't.

In the macro view, Amateur Radio is about community. Yes, we can experiment across our

bench, doing lots of technical tinkering, learning new things, building new things, developing new software, etc. but in the end, it's all for naught if we don't use what we build to communicate with at least some of our fellow humans.

Post-publication update: As of 2021-12-15, my wife Tina KD7WSF and I are no longer associated with the Bellingham Makerspace and the Bellingham Makerspace Amateur Radio Group. Thus ends my experiment to try to create a different kind of Amateur Radio organization at a Makerspace. It might be possible to pivot my ideas for a “new paradigm Amateur Radio Group” to a different community in the Bellingham area - to be determined.

It's probably just me, but these disparate things that occurred in the past couple of weeks spoke to me about the need for building community in Amateur Radio:

- For the Bellingham Makerspace Amateur Radio Group to succeed, we're going to have to form a community. Given the shared experience of the Bellingham Makerspace, it will be easier to form the Amateur Radio Group within the Bellingham Makerspace versus forming a club from “scratch”, but it will still be a lot of work to form those bonds of community and shared interest to be able to accomplish interesting things with the ARG. I'm just now beginning the process of figuring out how to do so.
- Dan Romanchik KB6NU recently gave a great presentation on [Helping People Have Fun with Amateur Radio](#) (which we older generation of Amateur Radio Operators think of as “Being an Elmer”, but is now better referred to as mentoring). KB6NU has some great perspective of those small things to build community one new Amateur Radio Operator at a time.
- The HamWAN Puget Sound Data Ring (PSDR) network (the original HamWAN network in Western Washington) has been dealt a setback in its network buildout (see next story). In part, this occurred because the collective “we” (all those who care about and use PSDR) didn't build enough community to have effective representation with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Washington State Legislature. We could have, we should have, and we need to.
- Building community isn't a one person job, but one person can make a world of difference. One of the most effective community builders I know of is Orv Beach W6BI who I consider the “Chief Evangelist” for Amateur Radio Emergency Digital Network (AREDN). Apparently [W6BI](#) does have a formal title within AREDN - “Ambassador”. W6BI is tireless in his promotion and education and outreach on behalf of AREDN. The most recent example was at [Pacificon 2021](#), where W6BI presented “Networking with AREDN Software”. But for COVID-19 Delta, and multiple vulnerabilities, I would almost certainly have attended Pacificon 2021 and it would have been fun to finally meet W6BI in person.
- I've volunteered to participate in an Amateur Radio organization here in Whatcom County. I'm completely new to this organization and don't know very much about its procedures, etc. so at the moment I'm dependent on the organization to “onboard” me. Unfortunately that organization seems too dysfunctional to be able to do so after a month, thus it seems that this organization's community has failed.

It doesn't quite fit with the "community" themes above, but [Steve Lampereur KB9MWR's article "Evangelism"](#) made me think about community. You could do worse to base a community around admiration for a person and their works.

In my last blog post I urged you to find someone in the ham radio arena to study. Since my interests are radio and Linux, it shouldn't be surprising that I tend to pay attention to Bruce Perens. Well know as the open source definition guy, but also a ham, K6BP.

A not too distant DCC paper titled "Open That Which is Closed," will give you a pretty good snapshot of the guy and what makes him tick.

I've always been a marginal coder, so I've always adopted the "what I can't do in software, I'll do in hardware", since I was into electronics before computers became common. Now things are so much software and less hardware, so I'm feeling old and dumb. Never fear, there is this thing Bruce does that he calls "Evangelism," and it can work for you too!

It's *work* to build community. It doesn't just happen. Well, OK, maybe it can sometimes "just happen, but that's rare. It can be fun and rewarding to see the community grow. But it's even more work to *maintain* community and that can be *unrewarding*. But if we don't work at maintaining our communities, they stagnate, linger, and ultimately die. Sometimes a community's death is a good thing if they've outlived their original purpose and no longer really serve a purpose.

There's a lot of organizations... communities... in Amateur Radio that are probably in a state of terminal decline as their participants age and die out, and those communities aren't bringing in new members. That's one of the reasons I'm trying to form the Amateur Radio Group within the Bellingham Makerspace to tap into its energy and sense of community because it will be much easier to interest young people in Amateur Radio because of that energy and sense of community and that they can see themselves represented in the Makerspace community much more so than the average Amateur Radio club these days.

On the other hand, with the advent of COVID-19 and the rise of good enough videoconferencing solutions such as Zoom, communities can form virtually. One of the very best examples of new virtual communities is the [Radio Amateur Training Planning and Activities Committee \(RATPAC\)](#) which provides two weekly videoconferences on a wide variety of topics.

I don't have any profound answers about "community" other than the big picture is that if you want a community to be healthy, interesting, and grow, sometimes you have to get involved personally and really put some energy and time into it. Then again, sometimes an community is just too far gone to save despite getting personally involved. Sometimes the only way to figure out which state the community is in... is to *try*.

HamWAN Puget Sound Data Ring Loses Several Sites

Writing on the [Puget Sound Data Ring mailing list](#) on October 18, 2021, Nigel Vander Houwen K7NVH reported this sad news. DNR is Washington State Department of Natural Resources,

which is charged with revenue generation from state lands (more typically sales of timber, but also managing mountaintop communications sites within their jurisdiction, to help fund schools in Washington.

Hello HamWAN volunteers/users/interested parties,

As has been previously discussed on the list, there has been a lot of happenings in the background over roughly the last year with regards to DNR sites. We've had several sites in limbo for some time as lease holders worked with DNR to sort things out, and we had some hopeful indications that it would end up working out in the end.

Unfortunately indications have greatly soured. As discussed in recent weeks, Rattlesnake and Larch Mountain were decommissioned recently, and we've now received official word that we'll need to decommission Gold Mountain in the coming weeks. As much as I'd like it to end there, we are not holding our breath for Capitol Peak or Blyn.

Unfortunately new rules DNR has placed on amateur leases effectively exclude use cases like HamWAN, if they were offering them at all due to DNR budget issues, and commercial rates are simply not feasible. I'm sure folks will think/suggest about additional donations to cover it, but commercial rates would require many-fold our current donation levels EVERY YEAR to make work. It's simply not something we can reasonably consider.

I'm very sorry to have to deliver this news to the many folks this will impact. This is obviously a major blow for the network. I'm thankful for the team who has put so much effort into building out these sites and maintaining the infrastructure, and I'm saddened to see that work torn down. Likewise I know there are quite a number of combined users, repeaters, and emergency groups who are going to be impacted by this. I hope that we can work with you to get you connected to another site where the pathing works.

We're not done. There's a lot of the core network, and a lot of coverage that doesn't rely on these DNR sites, and will remain operational. We'll likely need to do some work to reconsider/rework redundant pathing after this loss. Going forward I'm hopeful for finding new non-DNR sites where we can rebuild and expand once more.

If anyone has any specific notes or suggestions, please send us an email at netops@hamwan.org

As part of our monthly meeting of the Mount Baker Amateur Radio Club Digital Group this past week, some additional information was supplied. Amateur Radio is permitted access to DNR sites at a reduced rate because the Washington State Legislature provides a subsidy payment to DNR to offset the difference between "Amateur Radio rates" (\$100 / year) versus commercial rates (\$thousands / year). One primary issue is that HamWAN microwave network units simply aren't within the scope of what DNR considers "Amateur Radio" systems (basically, VHF and UHF repeaters).

We're fortunate in Whatcom County that connectivity from our primary HamWAN site (Lookout Mountain) into the rest of the Puget Sound Data Ring is not affected by the loss of these DNR sites.

I've passively admired HamWAN and its accomplishments for too long. I really need to get more involved, including regular financial contributions.

Yes, it's been suggested to HamWAN's principals that [grants from ARDC are available](#), but HamWAN's principals are uninterested.

Request To Send

This week has been consumed by some urgent matters at the Bellingham Makerspace requiring my personal hands-on, and Zero Retries suffered. I *really* hope that next week my schedule will be back to "more normal" to allow more focused time for Zero Retries.

I appreciate the nice feedback I received for Zero Retries 0013 and Zero Retries 0014 about my preparations for, and my postmortem of the Amateur Radio display at the Bellingham Makerspace for the 2021 Bellingham Maker Faire. Thanks folks!

ZR > BEACON

- Jeff Davis K9EV has a nice writeup on [AMSAT-UK's Online Colloquium this coming Sunday](#). It will be streamed live on YouTube - see KE9V's article for details.
- Speaking of space, Portland State University has [built its own satellite](#):
OreSat0 is the first in a series of three satellites designed by the Portland State Aerospace Society and is just about the size of a tissue box. The satellite includes solar panels, batteries, a color camera and an amateur radio system.
I really gotta get working on my SatNOGS station. In fact, I think a SatNOGS station will be a really cool first Amateur Radio project to work on at the Bellingham Makerspace Amateur Radio area. There's a lot of "making" to do - 3D printing various components, mechanical construction, a Raspberry Pi, a software defined receiver, etc.
- Still speaking of space, I don't remember which of my correspondents clued me into following Daniel Estévez EA4GPZ / M0HXM, but he's one of those brilliant folks who are also a fellow Amateur Radio Operator that just kind of make you proud that he's "one of us". EA4GPZ's latest feat:
[Decoding Lucy](#) - *Lucy is a spacecraft that will study the Trojan asteroids, during a twelve year mission. It was launched last Saturday at 9:34 UTC from Cape Canaveral on an Atlas V rocket. Its telemetry downlink is on X-band, at a frequency of 8445.768 MHz.*
- I, personally, have zero interest in watching the Indianapolis 500 or any other vehicle racing, at least until they convert the vehicles to electric. But I think I could get into watching this:
[Universities Will Race Autonomous Cars Around Indianapolis Motor Speedway This](#)

[Week](#).

The final event will be on Saturday October 23rd.

- They had me at mentioning a Raspberry Pi 4 tablet for \$259 from Amazon. But then they really got my attention:

[RasPad 3.0 Review: Building a Portable Raspberry Pi 4 Tablet with Built in RTL-SDR](#).

Yeah, I really needed another enticing project...

- My colleague on the ARDC Grants Advisory Committee Bob Witte K0NR wrote an article on his blog about the ARDC and the GAC - [What's This ARDC Grant Thing?](#)
- [ARDC's October 2021 Newsletter](#) is now available.
- If you're curious what Substack, the platform I use for Zero Retries Newsletter is about, this is a great overview of "The Enabling Effect of Substack" - [Four years on Substack: A conversation with Bill Bishop, Substacker #1](#).

Four years ago today, Bill Bishop launched the first-ever Substack publication. It was his newsletter about China, [Sinocism](#), which he had been writing for free for five years for an audience of policymakers, diplomats, academics, investors, executives, and journalists.

Closing The Channel

As of 2021-09-13, Zero Retries is now on Twitter - [@zeroretries](#). I'm not yet *very* active there, but I'll try to pay attention.

A commenter in Reddit pointed out that I should disclaim that the views I express in about Amateur Radio in Zero Retries are mostly about Amateur Radio in the US. That comment is correct, thus consider it disclaimed that Zero Retries has a US-centric perspective of Amateur Radio. I do my best to think of "rest of world" Amateur Radio in my writing, but I'm not there in other parts of the world, so if I say something blatantly inaccurate, please call me out.

If you're enjoying Zero Retries, please tell your friends and co-conspirators. For the immediate future, Zero Retries will remain an experiment in progress. Feedback is easy if you're reading Zero Retries in email - just hit Reply and I'll get your email. Or you can go to the web version of any Zero Retries issue, scroll to the bottom, and post a comment on the web version of a Zero Retries issue. I'm especially interested in content ideas about things that you'd like to see discussed in Zero Retries. If you know of "Zero Retries Interesting" projects, groups, activities, etc. please let me know. I do reply to every Zero Retries email I receive.

Email issues of Zero Retries are "instrumented" by [Substack](#) to gather basic statistics about opens, clicking links, etc. There is no "text only, no instrumentation" version of Zero Retries available. I don't use such information in any way other than (in the absence of much feedback) getting some satisfaction that the data shows that people actually do read Zero Retries.

All previous issues of Zero Retries are available without restriction (no paywalls). For some background on Zero Retries, Issue 0000 was The Introduction Issue.

Thanks for reading!
Steve Stroh N8GNJ
Bellingham, Washington, USA
2021-10-22

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Below is a much more complete “footer” that has evolved over 30+ issues of ZR.

Join the *Fun* on Amateur Radio

If you're not yet licensed as an Amateur Radio Operator, and would like to join the fun by *literally having a license to experiment with radio technology*, here are some pointers:

- **Ham Radio for Dummies** by Ward Silver N0AX is a great overview of Amateur Radio. N0AX is a gifted writer and HRFD is now in its [4th edition](#).
- My two favorite **YouTube** channels for a good overview of Amateur Radio are [AmateurLogic.TV](#). and [Ham Nation](#) (part of Ham Radio Crash Course). These folks just seem to have so much fun!
- [Radio Amateur Training Planning and Activities Committee \(RATPAC\)](#) offers weekly presentations on general Amateur Radio topics (Wednesdays) and emergency communications in Amateur Radio (Thursdays).
- Dan Romanchik KB6NU offers a free **No-Nonsense Study Guide** for the [Technician test](#) (PDF).
- [HamExam.org Amateur Radio Practice Exams](#) offers good **Flash Card and Practice Exams**.
- When you're ready to take an **Amateur Radio examination** (Tech, General, or Extra), W1MX - The MIT Amateur Radio Society offers [remote exams](#), free for students and youngsters. *There are apparently [many other remote exam options](#).*

Bonus - with an Amateur Radio license, you'll be [more attractive on dates](#) 😊

Closing the Channel

- In its mission to grow Amateur Radio and make it more relevant to society in the 2020s and beyond, Zero Retries is published via email and web, and is available to anyone at no cost. Zero Retries is proud *not to participate* in the Amateur Radio Publishing Industrial Complex!
- My ongoing Thanks to Tina Stroh KD7WSF for, well, *everything* and Bill Vodall

W7NWP as *Zero Retries Instigator in Chief*.

- My ongoing Thanks to pseudostaffers [Dan Romanchik KB6NU](#) and [Jeff Davis KE9V](#) for continuing to spot, and write about “Zero Retries Interesting” type items, on their respective blogs, from Amateur Radio and beyond, that I don’t spot on my own.
- [Southgate Amateur Radio News](#) consistently surfaces “Zero Retries Interesting” stories.
- The [Substack email publishing platform](#) makes Zero Retries possible. I recommend it for publishing newsletters.

If you see something interesting mentioned in Zero Retries and would like to search all the Zero Retries “Back Issues”, that’s now easy - just click:

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If you’re reading this issue on the web and you’d like to see Zero Retries in your email Inbox every Friday afternoon, just click:

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Leave a comment

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More bits from Steve Stroh N8GNJ:

- [SuperPacket blog](#) - *Discussing new generations of Amateur Radio Data Communications - beyond Packet Radio (a precursor to Zero Retries)*
- [N8GNJ blog](#) - *Amateur Radio Station N8GNJ and the mad science experiments at*

N8GNJ Labs - Bellingham, Washington, USA

Thanks for reading!

Steve Stroh N8GNJ (He / Him)

These bits were handcrafted in beautiful Bellingham, Washington, USA

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